



Early Childhood Connector | Fall 2023

Your quarterly newsletter on child care and early education.

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Welcome to the Early Childhood Connector

Thank you for signing up for the Early Childhood Connector Newsletter! The Minnesota Children's Cabinet and the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services created this newsletter to streamline communications to child care providers and early educators in Minnesota. Child care providers and early educators can expect a quarterly newsletter and some additional email updates. Please fill out the survey linked at the bottom of this newsletter to let us know what you think of the content and how we can improve our communications.

Early Childhood Connector Calls

In September, the state hosted its first Early Childhood Connector Call to answer child care questions related to legislation, licensing, programs, grants and more. The purpose of Connector Calls is to answer clarifying questions from providers and improve state communications. [Calls are recorded and available on the Early Childhood Connector webpage.](#)

Educators of all types are invited to these calls. We welcome questions from licensed programs, certified centers, exempt programs, legally nonlicensed providers, Family, Friend and Neighbor caregivers, and individuals interested in starting a child care business.

Join us at the next Early Childhood Connector Call

- **Next call date:** Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024 at 7 p.m. Central Time
- **Where:** Hosted virtually on WebEx
- **Meeting link:** <https://minnesota.webex.com/minnesota/j.php?MTID=mf60d07708da1e68a68509044d46cef20>
- **Purpose:** For the state to answer clarifying questions for child care providers and early educators. The state will not address individual grievances during this time.
- Please [submit your questions here](#). Questions must be submitted before the event; we will not answer live questions. We will do our best to answer all questions as time allows. Please submit your questions two weeks before the call, by Jan. 10, 2024.

Please save the date and meeting link on your calendar; the state will not send a meeting invite. The call will be recorded and temporarily available to folks who cannot attend.

[Learn more about Early Childhood Connector Calls, including upcoming dates, and submit your questions here.](#)

We look forward to seeing you at the next call!

Compensation Support Payments now permanently available to child care providers

The [new Great Start Compensation Support Payment Program](#) launched in October 2023 for eligible child care providers. The program is similar to Child Care Stabilization Base Grants and provides **permanent** compensation support payments to increase compensation for early childhood educators; payments will be \$375 a month per FTE through June 2024. Early childhood educators and businesses are essential to a thriving economy and community. The program's goal is to increase wages and income of early childhood educators so that Minnesota has a robust child care workforce.

Child care providers are highly encouraged to learn more and apply for Compensation Support Payments. Providers apply for the payments monthly, and the Department of Human Services emails eligible providers a unique application each month. Compensation Support Payments are available to licensed family child care providers, licensed child care centers, and certified child care centers in good standing with the state or their Tribal Nation. Award amounts are based on the total of FTEs with a set amount awarded per FTE. One person can account for up to two FTEs.

Under this new program, legal nonlicensed providers are eligible for \$500 Legal Nonlicensed One-Time Payments. These payments are designed to help newly registered legal nonlicensed providers to help cover the costs of getting registered and preparing their spaces for care.

Learn more about the Great Start Compensation Support Payment Program [on its webpage](#) or the [Frequently Asked Questions webpage](#). If you have questions that can't be answered on the website, contact Child Care Aware at 651-290-9704 or by email at supportfunds@childcareawaremn.org. You can also submit a question for the next [Early Childhood Connector Call](#).

Child Care Regulation Modernization update for licensed child care

The Child Care Regulation Modernization Project aims to create consistency throughout the state on licensing actions, allow eligible programs shorter inspections for outstanding performance, and modernize outdated licensing language. The project has three components:

- Risk-based tiered violation system (also known as the Weighted Risk System)
- Abbreviated inspections (also known as Key Indicator System)
- Revised licensing standards.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services contracted with the National Association for Regulatory Administration to assist with developing these components for both family child care and child care centers.

The project team recently hosted a WebEx [presentation](#) to discuss each component more in-depth and answer attendees' questions. The Aug. 16, 2023 [Questions and Answers document](#) is available on our [project website](#). If you have any questions about the project and its components, please contact us at ccregmodernization.dhs@state.mn.us.

A few key project milestones that are coming up (Note: these are anticipated dates and subject to change based on project needs):

- **March 2024:** Draft revised licensing standards to be released for public feedback
- **Spring 2024:** Details about abbreviated inspections implementation to be shared with providers, including policies and procedures and eligibility criteria.

To stay in the loop on stakeholder engagement opportunities, please sign up for the [Child Care Centers Regulation Modernization listserv](#) or [Family Child Care Regulation Modernization listserv](#).

Importance of Safe Sleep

In tribute to Minnesota's Infant Safe Sleep Week, the Minnesota Department of Health encourages all infant caregivers to tune into what pediatricians say about the best ways to keep babies sleeping safely.

In June 2022, the American Academy of Pediatrics released updated safe sleep recommendations for preventing sleep-related infant deaths. The recommendations continue to support the ABCs of safe sleep:

- **ALONE:** Infants should always sleep or nap alone - not sharing beds or cribs with others
- **BACK:** Always put a baby on their back to sleep or nap
- **CRIB:** Babies should always sleep or nap in their own safety-approved crib, play yard, bassinet, or portable crib without blankets or pillows. To keep warm during Minnesota winters, parents are urged to dress babies in pajamas or other clothing appropriate for the temperature.

Between 2014 and 2021, Minnesota averaged 46 sudden unexpected infant deaths each year. Nearly all of those tragic deaths happened in unsafe sleep environments. Most sudden, unexpected infant deaths in Minnesota are largely preventable. Learn more at [Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths \(Includes SIDS and Sleep-Related Infant Deaths\) and Safe Sleep - MN Dept. of Health \(state.mn.us\)](#)

Safe sleep standards for licensed child care programs

[Minnesota Statutes, chapter 245A](#), requires licensed child care providers to comply with specific safe sleep standards, crib inspections, sleep supervision and training requirements for working with infants.

During the 2023 legislative session, new language was **added** to [Minnesota Statutes, section 245A.1435](#), to align with American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations for infant safe sleep and to provide greater clarity for license holders. [New laws](#) become effective Jan. 1, 2024.

- When an infant younger than one year of age is placed down to sleep, the infant's pacifier cannot have anything attached to it, and the infant's clothing or sleepwear cannot have weighted materials, a hood, or a bib.
- An infant younger than one year of age may wear a helmet while sleeping if the license holder has specific documentation.
- A plain language definition of swaddling has been incorporated into the statute, as well as clarity on the type of sleepwear appropriate for swaddling.

- License holders can request a variance to permit the use of a cradleboard if requested by a parent or guardian for a cultural accommodation.

Additional information on safe sleep and other licensing requirements can be found on each licensed child care webpage: [Licensed Child Care Center Licensing webpage](#), [Family Child Care Licensing webpage](#) and [Licensing Help for Child Care](#).

For information on safe sleep requirements that apply to certified child care centers, see [Minnesota Statutes, section 245H.14, subd. 2](#). For legal nonlicensed child care, additional information on requirements can be found in the [Minnesota Child Care Assistance Program \(CCAP\) Policy Manual 11.9 Legal Nonlicensed Providers](#).

State invests in Early Learning Scholarships

Minnesota made significant investments in Early Learning Scholarships during the 2023 legislative session. The state is investing nearly \$200 million in fiscal years 2024-25 and \$59 million every two years ongoing to increase Early Learning Scholarships. There were also significant policy changes to the program, including:

- Providing eligibility and priority for children birth to age 3
- Adding child protective services as categorically eligible (no further demonstration of household income)
- Adding priority categories for children with a caregiver who has been incarcerated, is in a mental health or substance use disorder treatment program, or has experienced domestic violence
- Increasing the scholarship amount for children attending four-star Parent Aware-rated programs to the 75th percentile of market rates
- Reducing the amount of time by which a family must be enrolled in an early childhood program to use an awarded scholarship from 10 months to three months
- Increasing the income limit to the 85th percentile of median income while prioritizing families at the current income level of 185% of the federal poverty guidelines
- Investing up to \$5 million one-time and \$750,000 ongoing to create information technology systems, including but not limited to an online application, a case management system, attendance tracking and a centralized payment system.

These changes mean more children will have their early educational needs met through Early Learning Scholarships. The state is aligning Minnesota's quality rating system, Parent Aware, and licensing requirements to accommodate the increase in children using scholarships. Starting July 1, 2026, all licensed child care providers will automatically receive a One-Star Parent Aware Rating, unless they choose to opt out. The state will announce new opportunities for providers to participate in Parent Aware and become eligible to accept Early Learning Scholarships in early 2024.

Child care assistance rates and registration fees changed in October

The Child Care Assistance Program provides financial assistance to help income-eligible families pay for child care so parents may pursue employment or education leading to employment. Child care providers who serve families participating in child care assistance can be paid a maximum reimbursement amount.

In the last legislative session, Minnesota made historic investments in child care and early education, including changing Minnesota's law about Child Care Assistance Program rates. The new law, effective Oct. 30, 2023, requires rates to be set at the 75th percentile of the 2021 Market Rate Survey and updated every three years.

Approximately 90% of maximum rates and 80% of registration fees will increase. Counties and the cities of Sartell and St. Cloud may see some but not all maximum rates increase. For example, a county's maximum rates for infant care in a center may increase, while the maximum rate for preschool care in a center remains the same. No maximum rates will decrease.

Specific maximum rates can be found at:

- Minnesota Child Care Assistance Program Standard Maximum Rates – No Quality Differential ([DHS-6441E-ENG](#))
- Minnesota Child Care Assistance Program – 15% Quality Differential Maximum Rates ([DHS-6442E-ENG](#))
- Minnesota Child Care Assistance Program – 20% Quality Differential Maximum Rates ([DHS-6824C-ENG](#))

The Department of Human Services is now conducting the 2023 Market Rate Survey with all child care providers in Minnesota. It's important that all providers participate so that Child Care Assistance Program rates accurately reflect what providers are charging for their services. **Participate today by logging in to your [Child Care Aware Provider Update Tool](#) and taking the Market Rate Survey.** Existing users should visit the Update Tool and log in with their credentials. New users should activate their accounts using their license number and email address that Child Care Aware of Minnesota has on file. If you need assistance logging in or activating your account, please email UpdateTool@childcareawaremn.org.

Resources for families, children and providers

- [Additional resources for families, providers and communities](#)
- [Help Me Connect](#)
- [Office of the Ombuds for Family Child Care Providers](#)

Have questions?

Email ccs.communications.DHS@state.mn.us with questions.

Have feedback?

Let us know your thoughts on this newsletter [by taking a short survey](#). Your answers will help the state improve its communications with child care providers and early educators.